

Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter, Chair of the House Committee on Rules, asked the GAO to review federal efforts to collect data on antibiotic use in animals. Slaughter's request comes after she first raised the issue of non therapeutic use of antibiotics in animals as a national and urgent health crisis that jeopardizes the public health.

This past summer, Slaughter held a hearing to focus on the use of antibiotics in farm animals and to discuss her legislation, which would place limits on the use of those medications. At her hearing, the Food and Drug Administration agreed that this issue is a problem. Currently, Slaughter's legislation to limit the use of antibiotics has 50 cosponsors.

Slaughter's letter is attached below:

September 21, 2009

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro

Acting Comptroller

Government Accountability Office

441 G St., NW

Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am requesting the Government Accountability Office (GAO) review the status of federal efforts to track and monitor data on antibiotic use in animals and report on their progress in assessing and mitigating the human health risk related to antibiotic use in animals. As you may know, I introduced H.R. 1549, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act to address these critical issues and the Committee received an original jurisdiction referral.

The rapid increase in antibiotic resistance is a public health burden that experts attribute to the extensive use of antibiotics in humans and animals. Antibiotics continue to be used to promote growth, prevent disease, and treat disease in animals raised for human consumption.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been working for nearly two decades on efforts to track and monitor data on antibiotic use in animals to assess the human health risk related to antibiotic use in animals and help mitigate that risk. Yet, in a 2005 report entitled Antibiotic Resistance: Federal Agencies Need to Better Focus Efforts to Address Risk to Humans from Antibiotic Use in Animals, GAO found that data were not being collected on the types and amounts of antibiotics used in different species of food animals or whether they were used to promote growth, prevent disease, or treat disease.

Specifically, I would like for the study to address the following key areas:

- What data exist on the types and quantities of antibiotics used in food animals and on the purposes for which they are used?
- What further data do USDA, FDA, and CDC believe are needed to assess and mitigate the risks to humans from antibiotic use in animals and what efforts are underway or are needed to collect these data?
- To what extent is USDA monitoring food animals and meat for the emergence of antibiotic-resistant strains of pathogens, such as E. Coli, Campylobacter, Salmonella, and Listeria?

- How effectively is FDA overseeing industry compliance with currently approved animal antibiotics and uses for these antibiotics?
- What is FDA's plan and timeframe for reevaluating the antibiotics (and antibiotic uses) that it has approved for animals?
- What efforts have USDA, FDA, and CDC taken to assess the human health risks related to antibiotic use in animals, and what have the assessments shown?

Thank you for your immediate attention to this request. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact a member of my staff.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress